

Davenport House on Main Street, Benjamin's Richmond Home

By Alice M. Tyler.

The spring of 1865 was cold and lowering in Richmond. Above, sullen clouds; underneath, pools of water and dashes of rain rendered April's tears an additional burden, amid a general heaviness and an atmosphere of impending disaster.

There was one place, however, from which the spring breeze and an absolutely immaculate interior banished surface gloom and despondency, and that was the Richmond home of the Confederate Secretary of State, the Hon. Judah Philip Benjamin, called by Mr. Davis the "Brains of the Confederacy," a man who kept his own counsel between his firmly closed lips, whose inscrutable smile held at arm's length those who knew him best and those who knew him least.

A personality like that of Mr. Benjamin has always aroused interest and excited curiosity. During his residence among the circle brought together by the official life of the Confederacy, he interposed between himself and his associates a wall of reserve beyond which none passed. Authentic facts, therefore, connecting Mr. Benjamin with the years between '61 and '65 are facts of unusual importance.

The house, then, of his occupancy in this city, was a house built by Isaac Davenport I. and given to his son, Griffin Barney Davenport. It was No. 9 West Main street, and is now the property of Thomas D. Neal, Jr.

Isaac Davenport I., the founder of the Davenport family in Richmond, was the grandfather of Isaac Davenport II., of 610 West Franklin Street, and was himself a most active and influential figure in the early nineteenth century Richmond period. His home, built in the midst of spacious and beautiful grounds, stood at the corner of Main and Foushee Streets, where Mr. Frank T. Glasgow has lived for many years. Mr. Davenport was the first president of the Hollywood Association, president of the Virginia Fire and Marine Association, and founder of the Volunteer Fire Brigade, his salvage bag, with his name on it remaining as a souvenir of his service in the last mentioned organization.

This memento and many others are to be seen in the delightful library at 510 West Franklin Street. Here are grouped beautiful examples of the first Isaac Davenport's old mahogany furniture, cut-glass, silver and the work of an earlier generation; massive mirrors, candelabra and chandeliers. A mahogany chair with a reading rest is a reminder of the venerable citizen's scholarly tastes. A writing desk has, hung above it, the Davenport and Barney coats of arms. Within one of its drawers lies a beautiful specimen of hand-craft, fashioned of various colored silks in cross-stitch, and having quaint silver clasps inscribed with the date, 1767, and the names "Sarah and Griffin Barney." These were the quality folk of New Bedford, Mass., and ancestors of Isaac Davenport I., who came from Massachusetts to Virginia very early in the nineteenth century.

A tax receipt among Mr. Davenport's papers gives in the year 1817, the names of the sheriff of Richmond and his deputy as William S. Smith and R. Burton. A check drawn on the Bank of the United States for four hundred dollars is payable to Echols and Settle, and dated September 23, 1817. Another to Philip Haxall and Co., is for eight hundred and ninety dollars. More valuable than these, as an index to characters, are letters from Samuel Andrews, secretary of St. John's Sunday School, thanking Mr. Davenport for liberal benefactions to same, and showing that, as late as 1821 and 1822, numerous prominent Richmonders living at a distance from the Church on the Hill, still continued to hold membership in it.

Like many men of his careful and systematic type, Mr. Davenport kept a diary. An extract from the record of July 20, 1861, says: "The Congress of the Confederate States met this day in Richmond." There is a second mention on February 16, 1862, as follows: "A cold morning, snow on the ground. Next Tuesday, the 14th, the Congress of the Confederate States will meet in this city. The President, Davis, will be duly inaugurated on Saturday, 23d."

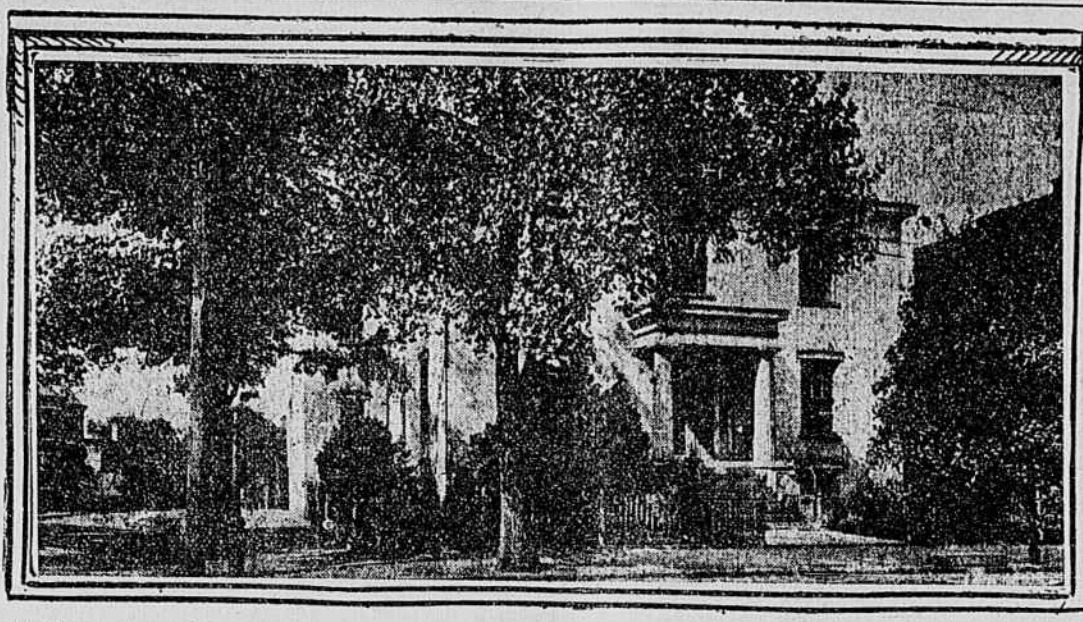
On Thursday, March 20, 1865, occurs this entry: "John M. Daniel, Editor of the Examiner, died this morning. Severe fighting in Petersburg last night."

A note appended states the price of flour to be one thousand dollars per barrel and butter sixteen dollars a pound, with other articles of provisions sold and used, equally high.

The tragic prelude to the horrors of "Evacuation Day" sounds in these words which end Mr. Davenport's connection with the record: "General Lee sends notice April 2, 1865, that the enemy has broken through his lines."



JUDAH P. BENJAMIN,
Secretary of State under President Jefferson Davis.
Photograph by H. P. Cook.



The former home of Isaac Davenport I., at the corner of Main and Foushee Streets, now the residence of F. T. Glasgow.



ISAAC DAVENPORT I.,
Who lost his life by the falling wall of his burning warehouse, April 3, 1865.

and that he cannot be responsible for the safety of the city. The different departments are sending off all their archives to the Danville railroad. Mr. Benjamin gives up Griffin's house this evening and he will leave at 8 o'clock for Danville. The banks also appear to be preparing for the danger and therefore much excitement is in the city.

On Monday, April 3, the whole lower part of Richmond was in flames, powder magazines and arsenals having been fired by departing Confederates. A pall of smoke hung black over the city when Isaac Davenport I., against the entreaties of his family, left his home at Foushee and Main Streets. His warehouses were at Fifteenth and Cary, where King & Company's plant is now located. Mr. Davenport was seventy-four years old, but was active and determined. Valuable ledgers were in the burning warehouses. Alone he penetrated the fire-ringed district, entered his place of business, secured his books and almost brought them safely out, almost—but not quite—for to the diary, with its entry on April 2, was added another by Griffin B. Davenport regarding his father, in these words: "Isaac Davenport, senior, died 3, of April, 1865, Monday. Killed by the falling of a brick wall at his warehouse, about 1 o'clock A. M. He was 74 years old."

His death was a catastrophe which seemed but a part of the universal horror which had swept Richmond like a besom. Friends felt that loss of life for him was a needless sacrifice, that he could be ill spared from the community, where his career had served as an example to those around him. In New Bedford, Massachusetts, and in Richmond he was long mourned and missed.

Before "Evacuation Day" came, however, Judah Philip Benjamin had, on Thursday, November 5, in the year '63, dictated the following note to his landlord, Griffin Barney Davenport:

"Dear Sir—I have concluded to retain the house next year according to the terms of your memorandum, viz \$250, per month, no ladies nor children to be in the house, and the bed linen to be returned to you."

I will send you the linen in a day or two."

Mr. Benjamin had a tenant successor, who altogether lacked his courtesy in correspondence. As soon as the departure of the Confederate Secretary of State left No. 9 West Main Street vacant, Griffin B. Davenport's family attempted to take possession of it, but were ordered to leave by representatives of the United States government in Richmond. From Washington, D. C., on July 20, 1865, Major General Sills Case, of the United States Army, writes:

"Mr. G. B. Davenport—Yours of the 15th inst. is received. The house formerly occupied by J. P. Benjamin, the Rebel Secretary of State, and which I have reason to believe was owned by you, was assigned to me as quarters by the Q. M.'s orders, as I understood. Major G. G. Weitzel, then in command of the Army of the James."

I occupied the house about one month



9 West Main Street, belonging to Griffin B. Davenport and occupied by Judah P. Benjamin during the War Between the States.
Photograph by H. P. Cook.

from the 9th or 10th day of April, 1865."

And going about thus, in a circle on paper, Richmond and the day of the Festival of Fools—April 1, 1865—comes uppermost again. It was Saturday, about 5 o'clock of the afternoon of this day. As has been said, the interior of No. 9 West Main Street gave no hint of outside gloom. Mr. Benjamin, in accordance with his usual habit, had begun his work early in the morning, directly after his frugal breakfast. He was in his office at 8 o'clock. He had attended to numerous details. He had had a consultation of some hours with the President. Now he had, it would seem, finished his work. There was an air of finality about his bearing, the air of a man who has triumphed over the inevitable in a parting fling of gay defiance. He looked ready, as he sat in his easy chair, and watched the flames curling redly upward, to kiss his hand in making an exit from a stage, where he had

played a losing game with an unbroken pride and spirit.

Turning, he took up a box lying upon the table beside him, a box carefully tied and addressed. He then rang the bell and, in a moment, a dark form appeared in the doorway. "Carry out my orders," he said, "everything packed and ready? Has nothing escaped you? Have you burned all papers as I directed? For in a few hours more we must be moving. Henri, we have nothing more here to stay for, or to hope for."

"Yes, Master," said the negro whose eyes were full of sympathy and ready to fill with tears.

"But," said Mr. Benjamin, "we are not pulling long faces in saying adieu. We are going with smiles, not with tears. We have had all that Richmond could give us and we should be grateful not to turn our good-bys into something that will be a sweet memory for days to come. Now, Henri, I want you to take this address written on it. You know you have carried many such boxes, but names are best unspoken. Be sure Henri, to deliver these yourself, and when you come back, for a half dozen good fellows will be here to supper and the last supper for a long time. We have lived for three years or more, must be the best and the merriest that we can manage. Now away with you." And, in a moment, the click of the door proclaimed that Henri had gone.

Mr. Benjamin sat musing once again. His form relaxed and his lips were softly smiling. A man no longer young, a man who had never possessed the attributes of only beauty? Nevertheless, a man who dominated those he came in contact with, a looker on at the strivings of others with a conscious sense of superiority and power. He was dreaming back along the track of years that for him had already vanished. "So," he said to himself, "that chapter is closed, thank God. Only romance and sentiment fill its pages. No disillusion can mar the joy with which it will awaken, when the fragrance of flowers and melody of song call it into being. Better the ache of parting now, is it not so Madonna mia?" And he took a spray of white jasmine from the leaves of a slim note book, pressed it to his lips and replaced it, before going alertly up the steps to make ready for supper.

Mr. Benjamin was a famous host. While not popular in the general sense of the word, he could always summon as his guests a group of the most agreeable and brilliant of the men with whom his official life had brought him into acquaintance. None who supped with him on April 1 realized that for him and them the bitter end had come. His wit was more daring, his rare laugh more frequent, his sallies more audacious than ever before, they thought.

Afterward they remembered, especially the drinking of the last toast, to the memory of John M. Daniel, whose life had flickered out on March 30. Mr. Benjamin admired Daniel's genius and excused his bitterness. "Let us drink standing and in silence to Daniel, gentlemen," he said. "I thank God that

he is freed from the shadow to be cast by the coming years. The glasses were drained and then—chash!—they were broken.

The next night Benjamin had gone and No. 9 West Main Street was in possession of the Federal authorities, who were sorry enough not to have captured the "Rebel Secretary of State." Mr. Benjamin was polite as always, even to his enemies. He left his visiting card behind for the benefit of Major-General Case. The rooms where the supper was laid and the toasts were drunk were desolate and empty. And upon the petals of roses delivered by Henri on April 1, fell a shower of tears that must have bridged distance and rendered Mr. Benjamin wakeful, for sleep forsook him as the grain bearing him southward lumbered away through the darkness.

"Strange turns of fate these," he murmured. Weariness overpowered him after awhile and in a sort of waking dream, he was again fighting on the floor of the United States Senate as in ante-bellum days. Then the fragrant perfume of roses stole over his senses and he fell into unconsciousness.

Some days later he and Henri were pursuing their flight independently, having left the President's party. Mr. Benjamin had no mind to submit to undue humiliation. He had thought the matter out before he began his preparations in Richmond. And the two, master and man, by the exercise of much prudence and vigilance, found themselves finally on the Florida coast, with the sea, and an open boat before them, the distant Bahamas their destination.

"Henri," said Mr. Benjamin, "I am going to leave this country. Do you want to come with me? You see the boat and you know that we may go down before we get by a roundabout way to the Bahamas. Don't you want me to give you some money and send you home to old Louisiana?"

"Marster," asked Henri, "what is the Bahamas?"

"They are islands, Henri."

"Well, Marster, what you goes I is a-gwine too. We dun lib together too long far me to go back on you now. I'd rather not hab to go in de boat, but I ain't afraid wid you, Marster."

"Come on then, Henri," said Mr. Benjamin.

The Bahamas proved an agreeable resting place, but after awhile Mr. Benjamin and Henri traveled further and, in September, they landed in Liverpool. In London, as all the world knows, Fate made amends for the rebuff dealt in 1865. As Queen's counsel in 1872, Mr. Benjamin was distinguished at the London bar, as he had been in his youth at New Orleans and on the floor of the congressional halls in Washington, D. C., as he was during the period of full maturity, when he was a member of the Confederate Cabinet, and an indweller at No. 9 West Main Street.

Few echoes came back from the

home across the seas on which the choice of Mr. Benjamin's later years fell. The Southern Historical Papers in Vol. VII, contain a copy of a letter written by him and published in the London Times exonerating the Confederate government from the charge brought against it of cruelty to Federal prisoners. In this letter Mr. Benjamin stated that Mr. Davis defended the prisoners taken in the Dahlgren raid in March, 1864, against the judgement of two-thirds of the Cabinet who considered that they had forfeited their rights of prisoners, on account of their attempt to carry out their commander's savage and inhuman orders, in his attack upon Richmond.

Henri served Mr. Benjamin as faithfully in London in the days of his prosperity as he had done in Virginia in the days of his adversity. Always Mr. Benjamin wore his inscrutable smile. More and more as the years went on, he seemed to be withdrawn within a world of his own, though to the last he was a genial philosopher, a ready humorist and a lenient judge of the failings of others.

A morning came when Mr. Benjamin was not in his office at his early working hour. The habit of a lifetime was broken. Henri, summoned to his master's chamber was sole recipient of his confidence. "Henri," he said, "once more I have finished my work. London in a few days will know me no longer. For I can no more play the game, Henri. A few additional moves and it will be 'checkmate' for me. But the journey I shall travel now will be one on which I shall leave you behind me in a foreign land. He raised himself on his pillow, drew from beneath it a small package and, putting it into Henri's hand bade him secure passage for New York from Liverpool on a certain day."

"Go from New York to Richmond, Henri," directed Mr. Benjamin, "and take this small packet—you know where. Then return to the little cottage in New Orleans where Charlotte is waiting for you. And when you think of me, as I know you will sometimes, think of me as one who journeyed on, without being afraid of what he might find at the end of the road."

So these two comrades parted. About six weeks later Henri stood before a well-known door in Richmond and was admitted to a well-known presence. When he had placed the packet in hand held out to receive it, the negro went on his lonely way, back to Louisiana, to the cottage with the clean daisies in bloom before its door, and to Charlotte singing softly to herself in the sunshine and breaking off to greet him with a glad rush and a wild cry of joy.

In Richmond, a girl paused beside a tall woman at an evening entertainment where none were fairer than

this same tall woman. "Why, where did you get it?" asked the girl, pointing to an exquisite spray of white jasmine, done in pearls and emeralds, that held the lace at the woman's breast. The dark eyes turned on the girl. "This," she said clearly and sweetly, "is a gift from a past that I love to remember." And the girl questioned no further.

But when the end of the road which Mr. Benjamin did not fear had been reached in Paris, the traveler bore within a hand closed upon his breast an amulet—a withered spray of white jasmine.

BUENA VISTA

[Special to The Times-Dispatch.]

Buena Vista, Va., May 25.—The second meeting of the Buena Vista Tournament Association was held in the office of W. T. Paxton on Tuesday evening. The following officers were elected for the ensuing year: J. H. Glasgow, president; W. T. Robey, vice-president; M. E. Souder, secretary; R. B. Ewald, treasurer. A number of committees were appointed.

The lawn party given by the band boys on Saturday evening was a big success.

Memorial Day exercises will be held at the Methodist Church on June 5 at 2 o'clock. Appropriate addresses will be delivered by prominent speakers.

Homer H. Parker, of Covington, spent Friday and Saturday here.

A. O. Borka, W. T. Paxton, A. W. Robertson, H. R. Mills and J. H. Glasgow attended the Democratic convention in Norfolk this week.

F. W. Hossie, of Johnstown, Pa., was in the city this week.

Willie Lackey, of Los Angeles, Cal., is the guest of his sister, Mrs. R. H. Ewald.

C. W. Rubush, who has been spending a week in Augusta county, returned home Monday evening.

O. M. Stull is in Chicago.

BLACKSBURG

[Special to The Times-Dispatch.]

Blacksburg, Va., May 25.—Miss Hattie Woolwine, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R. Woolwine, of this place, and Mark McDonald, of Sioux City, Idaho, were married at the home of the bride's parents Thursday afternoon.

Only the immediate family was present at the ceremony. The wedding was performed by Dr. Henry P. Hamlin of the Methodist Church, and Mr. and Mrs. McDonald left just afterwards for a Western trip.

All entertaining, even of the most informal kind, has given way for preparations looking to the entertainment of visitors that will be in town for the Institute finale, June 7 to 12.

Mrs. J. M. Ormonde, of Richmond, spent the past week here as the guest of Mr. Alexander Black, arranging for the opening of Colonel Palmer's summer home, "Mountain View," early in June.

Mrs. E. M. Barringer and Miss Lily Long, of Charlotte, N. C., left Wednesday for Harrisonburg, Pa., after a visit to President and Mrs. P. B. Barringer at the University of Virginia.

Rev. J. S. Sharpe and little son left Tuesday for Grenada, Miss., and Mrs. B. B. Campbell, for Lynchburg, after a month's visit here to their parents, Rev. and Mrs. B. B. Branscomb.

Mrs. H. S. Ladd, who has returned to her home at Ashland, after a visit here to her sister, Mrs. L. S. Randolph.

Professor Pitt S. Murrill, of Columbia University, New York, is the guest of his parents here. Mrs. Murrill will join him later.

Mrs. Ella Ford and Miss Dora Ford, of Lynchburg, are house guests of Dr. and Mrs. R. H. Hudnall, on "Faculty Row."

Dr. Sarah Allen, of Charleston, S. C., is the guest of her sister, Mrs. E. A. Smythe. Professor Smythe returned Wednesday from the Jefferson Hospital, in Roanoke, where he recently underwent an operation.

Mrs. J. M. Ormonde returned this week from Charlottesville, and has as her guest her sister, Miss Nellie Walker, of Roanoke.

Miss Susan Camper left this week for an extended visit to her sister, Mrs. L. W. Fink, at Pulaski.



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